

¶ **A**llas! quod she, that evere this sholde
happe!
for wende I nevere, by possibilitee,
That swich a monstre or mervelle myghte be!
It is agayns the proces of nature:
¶ And hoom she goth a sorweful creature.
for verray feere unneth the may she go,
She wepeth, wailleth, at a day or two,
And swowneth, that it routhe was to see;
But why it was, to no wight tolde shee,
for out of towne was goon Hrveragus.
But to himself she spak, and seyde thus,
With face pale and with ful sorweful cheere,
In hire compleynt, as ye shal after heere.

¶ **A**llas! quod she, on thee, fortune, I pleyne,
That unwar wrapped hast me in thy cheyne;
for which, tescap, woot I no socour,
Save oonly deeth or elles dishonour;
Oon of these two bihoveth me to chese.
But natheles, yet have I levere to lese
My lif than of my body have a shame,
Or knowe myselfen fals, or lese my name;
And with my deth I may be quyt, ywis.
Hath ther nat many a noble wyf, er this,
And many a mayde, yslayn herself, alas!
Rather than with hir body doon trespas?

¶ **I**S, certes, lo, these stories beren witness;
Whan thretty tiraunts, ful of cursednesse,
Hadde slayn Phidoun in Athenes, atte feste,
They comanded his doghtres for tarest, e,
And bryngen hem biforn hem in despit
Al naked, to fulfill hire foul delit,
And in hir fadres blood they made hem daunce
Upon the pavement, God yeve hem myschaunce!
for which these woful maydens, ful of drede,
Rather than they wolde lese hir maydenhede
They prively been stirt into a welle,
And dreynte hemselven, as the bookes telle.
¶ They of Messene leete enquire and seke
Of Lacedomye fifty maydens eke,
On whiche they wolden doon hir lecherye;
But was ther noon of al that compaignye
That she nas slayn, and with a good entente
Chees rather for to dye than assente
To been oppressed of hir maydenhede.
Why sholde I thanne to dye been in drede?
¶ Lo, eek, the tiraunt Aristoclesides,
That loved a mayden heet Stymphalides,
Whan that hir fader slayn was on a nyght,
Unto Dianas temple goth she right,
And hente the ymage in hir handes two,
fro which ymage wolde she nevere go:
No wight ne myghte hir handes of it arace
Til she was slayn right in the selve place.

¶ **N**ow sith that maydens hadden swich
despit
To been defouled with mannes foul delit,
Wel oghte a wyf rather herselfen slee
Than be defouled, as it thynketh me.
¶ What shal I seyn of Hasdrubales wyf,
That at Cartage birafte herself hir lyf?
for whan she saugh that Romayns wan the toun,
She took hir children alle, and skipte adoun

Into the fyr, and chees rather to dye
Than any Romayn dide hire vileynye.
¶ Hath nat Lucresse yslayn herself, alas!
At Rome, whan that she oppressed was
Of Tarquyn, for hire thoughte it was a shame
To lyven whan she hadde lost hir name?
¶ The sevene maydens of Melesie, also,
Han slayn hemself, for verray drede and wo,
Rather than folk of Gawle hem sholde oppresse.
Mo than a thousand stories, as I gesse,
Koude I now telle as touchyng this matere.
¶ Whan Habradate was slayn, his wyf so deere
Herselfen slow, and leet hir blood to glyde
In Habradates woundes depe and wyde,
And seyde, My body, at the leeste way,
Ther shal no wight defoulen, if I may.

¶ **W**hat sholde I mo ensamples heerof sayn,
Sith that so manye han hemselven slayn
Wel rather than they wolde defouled be?
I wol conclude, that it is bet for me
To sleen myself, than been defouled thus.
I wol be trewe unto Hrveragus,
Or rather sleen myself in som manere,
¶ As dide Demociones doghter deere,
Bycause that she wolde nat defouled be.
¶ O Cedasus! it is ful greet pitee
To reden how thy doghtren deyde, alas!
That slowe hemselven for swich maner cas.

¶ **H**s greet a pitee was it, or wel moore,
The Theban mayden, that for Nichanore
Herselfen slow, right for swich manere wo.
¶ Another Theban mayden dide right so;
for oon of Macidoyn hadde hire oppressed,
She with hir deeth hir maydenhede redressed.

¶ **W**hat shal I seye of Nicerates wyf,
That for swich cas birafte herself hir lyf?
How trewe eek was to Alcebiades
His love, that rather for to dyen chees
Than for to suffre his body unburyed be?
¶ Lo which a wyf was Alceste, quod she.
¶ What seith Omer of goode Penelope?
Al Grece knoweth of hire chastitee.

¶ **P**ardee, of Laodomya is writen thus,
That whan at Troie was slayn Protheselaus,
No lenger wolde she lyve after his day.

¶ **T**he same of noble Porcia telle I may;
Withoute Brutus koude she nat lyve,
To whom she hadde al hool hir herte yive.

¶ **T**he parfit wyfhod of Arthemisie
Honoured is thurgh al the Barbarie.

¶ **O** Teuta, queene! thy wyfly chastitee
To alle wyves may a mirour bee.

¶ **T**he same thyng I seye of Bilyea,
Of Rodogone, and eek Valeria.

¶ **T**hus pleynd Dorigene a day or tweye,
Durposyng evere that she wolde deye.
But natheles, upon the thridde
nyght

hoom cam Hrveragus, this worthy
knyght,
And asked hire, why that she weep so soore;
And she gan wepen ever lenger the moore.



¶ **A**llas! quod she, that evere I was born!
Thus have I seyde, quod she, thus have I
sworn

And toold hym al as ye han herd bifore;
It nedeth nat rehere it yow namoore.
This housbonde, with glad chiere, in frendly
wyse,

Answerde and seyde as I shal yow devyse:
Is ther oght elles, Dorigen, but this?

¶ **N**ay, nay, quod she, God help me so, as
wys!

This is to muche, and it were Goddes wille.
Ye, wyf, quod he, lat sleepen that is stille;
It may be wel, paraventure, yet today.

Ye shul youre trouthe holden, by my fay!
for God so wistly have mercy upon me,
I hadde wel levere ystiked for to be,
for verray love which that I to yow have,

But if ye sholde youre trouthe kepe and save!
Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may
kepe:

¶ **W**ith that word he brast anon to
wepe,
And seyde, I yow forbode, uppeyne of
deeth,

That nevere, whil thee lasteth lyf ne breeth,
To no wight tel thou of this aventure.

As I may best, I wol my wo endure,
Ne make no contenance of hevynesse,
That folk of yow may demen harm or gesse.

¶ **A**nd forth he cleped a squier & a mayde:
Gooth forth anon with Dorigen, he
sayde,

And bryngeth hire to swich a place anon.
¶ They take hir leve, and on hir wey they gon;
But they ne wiste why she thider wente.
He nolde no wight tellen his entente.

¶ **D**YWIS,
¶ **A**DVENTURE an heep of yow,

¶ **W**ol holden hym a lewed man in this,
That he wol putte his wyf in jupartie;
Herkeneth the tale, er ye upon hir crie.

¶ **S**he may have bettre fortune than yow semeth;
And whan that ye han herd the tale, demeth.

¶ **T**his squier, which that highte Aurelius,
On Dorigen that was so amorous,
Of aventure happed hire to meete
Amydde the toun, right in the quykkest
strete,

As she was bowen to goon the wey forthright
Toward the gardyn theras she had hight;
And he was to the gardynward also;
for wel he spyed, whan she wolde go
Out of hir hous to any maner place.